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UNCLAS VATICAN 001747

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: POPE CALLS ON WORLD NOT TO FORGET GREAT LAKES
CONFLICT

REF: VATICAN 01329

SUMMARY

1. (U) DURING HIS WEEKLY WEDNESDAY AUDIENCE IN ST. PETER'S
SQUARE APRIL 9, POPE JOHN PAUL II URGED THE WORLD TO NOT
FORGET THE VIOLENT AND CONTINUING CONFLICT IN THE GREAT LAKES
REGION OF AFRICA, AND CALLED ON LEADERS TO RETURN TO THE
PEACE PROCESS. VATICAN OFFICIALS HAD PASSED EMBASSY A
PRO-MEMORIA ON MARCH 24 SEEKING U.S. SUPPORT IN STOPPING THE
VIOLENCE IN THE ITURI REGION OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF
CONGO AND MAKING PROGRESS IN THE PEACE PROCESS (REFTEL). IN
THE FACE OF CONTINUING INTERNATIONAL FOCUS ON IRAQ, THE POPE
SOUGHT TO CALL ATTENTION TO THE CRISIS IN AFRICA -- A POINT
HE REITERATED IN HIS APRIL 20 EASTER MESSAGE. END SUMMARY

2. (U) ADDRESSING A GENERAL AUDIENCE APRIL 6 ON THE GREAT
LAKES CONFLICT, POPE JOHN PAUL II DIRECTED "A HEARTFELT
APPEAL TO THE POLITICIANS IN CHARGE, AS WELL AS TO ALL MEN
AND WOMEN OF GOOD WILL, SO THAT THEY COMMIT THEMSELVES TO
BRING AN END TO THE VIOLENCE AND ABUSE, PUTTING ASIDE
PERSONAL SELFISHNESS AND GROUP INTERESTS, WITH THE ACTIVE
COLLABORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY." THE POPE WAS
RESPONDING TO REPORTS OF APRIL 6 FROM THE U.N. MISSION IN THE
CONGO THAT AROUND 1,000 PEOPLE DIED THE WEEK BEFORE IN WHAT
APPEARED TO BE ETHNIC MASSACRES, INCLUDING SUMMARY
EXECUTIONS. RECOGNIZING THAT THIS VIOLENCE BROUGHT WITH IT
THE POTENTIAL TO REIGNITE MASSIVE ARMED CONFLICT IN THE
REGION, THE POPE URGED THAT "EVERY EFFORT AT RECONCILIATION
AMONG THE CONGOLESE, UGANDAN AND RWANDAN PEOPLES MUST BE
ENCOURAGED...WITH THE HOPE THAT FROM THESE EFFORTS PEACE
WHICH IS SO DESIRED, CAN FLOWER."

3. (U) IN HIS EASTER MESSAGE, THE POPE FOLLOWED HIS CALL FOR
PEACE IN IRAQ WITH A CALL FOR "PEACE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE
WORLD, WHERE FORGOTTEN WARS AND PROTRACTED HOSTILITIES ARE
CAUSING DEATHS AND INJURIES AMID SILENCE AND NEGLECT ON THE
PART OF CONSIDERABLE SECTORS OF PUBLIC OPINION." HE
CAUTIONED THAT THE AFRICAN CONTINENT "CANNOT BE ABANDONED TO
ITSELF."

COMMENT

4. (SBU) THE VATICAN IS DEEPLY WORRIED ABOUT THE POTENTIAL
FOR RENEWED VIOLENCE IN AN ALREADY DEVASTATED REGION. ADDING
TO THE POPE'S WORRIES IS THE FEAR THAT THE WAR IN IRAQ HAS
TAKEN FOCUS AWAY FROM THE VIOLENT CONFLICT IN AFRICA, AND
THAT WITHOUT THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY'S COLLABORATION, A
TENUOUS PEACE WILL REVERT TO FURTHER ETHNIC SLAUGHTER. THE
POPE'S STRONG PUBLIC STATEMENT REFLECTS THE HOLY SEE'S
CONTINUING SUPPORT FOR PEACE IN THE REGION, AND ITS DESIRE TO
ENSURE THIS CRISIS IS NOT FORGOTTEN IN THE GLOBAL FOCUS ON
IRAQ.

NICHOLSON

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